



Testimony of ConnCAN
Education Committee Hearing
March 25, 2022

Testimony Regarding: SB 398 and HB 5437

Co-Chairs Senator Osten and Representative Walker, Ranking Members Representative France and Senator Miner, and other distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Hamish MacPhail and I am the Policy and Research Director for ConnCAN.

Today, I am here to testify on Senate Bill 398: An Act Concerning Accountability for the Expenditure of Funds Received by the State, and House Bill 5437: An Act Concerning Equity and the Governor's Budget.

On Senate Bill 398

The State of Connecticut, its municipalities, and all school districts received once-in-a-generation federal grants funds due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on education, the American Rescue Plan (ARP ESSER) provided \$1.1B dollars to the state, with over \$990M going directly to our school districts. The funds could be used for a wide variety of programs, facilities investments, and staffing. This is all welcome news.

However, ConnCAN believes that more should be done to ensure that funds are spent correctly, and that the results of the grant program (i.e. the priority goals) are publicly reported at the conclusion of the grant period. Only then, can the public fully understand the impact, success, or limitations of the grant money provided to school districts.

The State Department of Education has done a good job evaluating the ARP ESSER grant applications for each district, and have made those applications available on their e-grant management website. This transparency sets us apart from many other states. Yet, once those funds are approved, how can we know that they are spent in accordance with the law, and that the outcomes each district prioritized are actually achieved by the September 30, 2024 date?

We must know how this funding impacted student outcomes, and the extent to which each district successfully aligned their resources with their priorities to achieve an adequate result.

ConnCAN has attached recommended language for SB398 (Appendix A) to include school district financial reporting, and outcome reporting. All of the data needed to report on outcomes are already kept by the districts, and the slight increase in reporting requirements will provide significant insights on the efficacy of the ARP ESSER program in improving student outcomes.

On House Bill 5437

This bill seeks to address how budgetary decisions impact equity in the state. This is a great new measure that we must prioritize if we want all of our residents to have a fair shot at success. However, the term “equity” is not concrete in this bill. What does it mean and how can its definition help inform the Governor’s office of its budgetary implications on the public?

ConnCAN recommends a clearer definition of equity, and more broadly, an equity strategic plan for the state. We know that each of our systems, be it education, house or economic opportunity, are inequitable. But, right now, we don’t have a strategic sense of how to reduce inequities nor clarity on how many resources are required to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable.

ConnCAN would be happy to collaborate with other stakeholders to adequately define “equity” and to create a statewide “equity strategic plan” that the Governor’s office and the legislature can use to analyze the impact of its investments.

Thank you.

Appendix A: Recommended Language for SB 398 for School District Reporting

Overview: Creates a requirement for the State Department of Education and any local and regional school district that receives education grant dollars from the federal government to report on the planned use of those funds, and provide publicly available outcome data at the conclusion of grant period.

Purpose: To build transparency in the planning, implementation, and reporting of outcomes for all federal grants

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section (1) NEW (effective October 1, 2022): (a) For fiscal year ending June 30, 2023 and each year thereafter, any publicly funded educational entity, including but not limited to: local and regional school districts, state charter schools, magnet schools, vocational-agricultural schools, and career and technical schools, shall submit a grant application to the State Department of Education for each federal grant program in which they plan to participate.

(b) Each grant application shall include defined program goals, a budget, points of contact, and other necessary information in accordance with the federal grant program requirements.

(c) All grant applications shall be made publicly available on the State Department of Education e-grant management system website, in downloadable form.

(d) At the conclusion of the grant period, any participating school district shall submit a report to the State Department of Education indicating the outcome data associated with the program goals, described at the onset of the grant period, and in subsection (b). The report template shall be developed and made available by the State Department of Education. The report shall include all applicable data outlining progress toward the program goals, and clear rationale for goal achievement and/or lack of achievement. All reports must be filed within a timely manner, based on guidance from the State Department of Education.

(e) The State Department of Education shall review grant outcome reports and make them available on the e-grant management system website within 30 days of receiving the report.

(f) At the discretion of the State Department of Education, exemplar grant outcomes may receive additional praise, support, and funding, should available funds allow.

(g) Any federal grant program active but not completed by October 1, 2022 shall complete an outcome report as outlined in subsection (d).